

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 20, 1951

Career of Crime

After Mrs. Sanchez became Mrs. George W. Crane, her fourth husband took over the guardianship of his stepchildren and did not stop in the efforts to get money from Roach and the bondholders. Roach remained in hiding even though his enemy, Belcher, had been killed. He hired Isaac Wall, speaker of the House and Monterey's first senator, as his attorney in place of Ord.

When Wall and a popular young constable, Thomas Williamson, headed south with a pack train, it was thought they were taking money to Roach. They left Monterey November 6, 1856, and made first night's camp at an arroyo on the Buena Esperanza rancho, 25 miles south of Monterey. The next morning David Spence, owner of the ranch, found the camp and both men dead. Their equipment had been scattered over a wide area, showing that a search had been made for the money. The shadow of the brutal murder fell upon Anastacio Garcia. His home was at El Tucho, named for a weed, tucho, which grew there. It was where the town's renegades lived and where Fort Ord is now located.

The headstone over Williamson's grave in the Monterey cemetery reads: "Thomas Williamson, murdered in Monterey County, Nov. 7, 1856"

David Spence came to Monterey in 1824 from Peru to superintend the meat packing plant of Begg & Co. In 1829 he married Adelaide, daughter of Mariana Estrada, and was later the grantee of the Encinal y Buena Esperanza rancho.

According to Bancroft's History of California, Garcia started Tiburcio Vasquez on his career of crime in 1850, when they killed Constable Harmount at a dance in Monterey. He was considered the most bloodthirsty man in Monterey County's history. Mrs. Garcia told that her husband admitted 14 murders to her. His criminal career as head of the "Manilas," a gang of Mexican cut-throats is described by Bancroft.

When the sheriff, John Keating, and his posse went for Garcia, Mrs. Garcia opened the door and said her husband was not there, but he suddenly jumped from behind skirts, shot Undersheriff Joaquin de la Torre,

then Charles Layton, who was a citizen volunteer, and grabbing Jim Beckwith's horse, killed him and escaped. Beckwith had also been a volunteer on the manhunt.

Joaquin de la Torre was active in the revolution against Governor Manuel Micheltoarena. Joaquin was grantee of Rancho Arroyo Seco. Charles Layton had come to Monterey in 1847 with Company F, Third U.S. Artillery. He was keeper of the Point Pinos Lighthouse which had just been erected. Beckwith had only been in Monterey a few days and was looking for excitement when he volunteered to go on the hunt for Garcia.

A few weeks later Mrs. Garcia arrived in Monterey and made arrangements to go by boat to San Pedro. Whereupon public funds were raised to send Tom Clay, an eccentric school teacher, to follow her. By the time the boat reached San Pedro, Mrs. Garcia had become friendly enough with Clay to arrange for him to get a team of horses at a certain spot; at the same time she showed him a letter giving instructions on how to get to an adobe on La Brea rancho. Clay asked the woman to wait at the landing while he got the team. He got in touch with the Santa Barbara County sheriff instead, and when Mrs. Garcia next saw her husband he was being returned to jail in Salinas.

As soon as Garcia was jailed he sent for the men who were responsible for his having murdered Wall and Williamson, and threatened to tell all unless he was released. They promised to break into the jail that night and free him. Instead they put a lariat around his neck and over a wooden beam, tied his feet to an iron ring in the wall, and when they pulled the lariat, Garcia's neck was broken.

The next day the jailer made this entry in the Monterey County jail register "Anastacio Garcia, charged with murder, found strangled in his jail cell this morning, February 17, 1857."

(More tomorrow)